



EPISODE 43: 2021-25 PLAYING RULE CHANGES

Additional Q & A

Question

Player A1 has possession and control of the puck. Player B1 delivers a legal body check from the side using only hips through shoulder contact with two hands on the stick and the blade of the stick on the ice. Player A1 is separated from the puck, and at the exact second of separation, player B2 skates by and takes the puck. Is this a legal play?

Answer

Yes. We have to be realistic in the application of Rule 640(d). The spirit and intent of the rule is to make an effort to win possession of the puck and to deliver a clean check. The chances of a legal body check being delivered is greatly enhanced when the player delivering the check has their stick (which then also means their hands) down. If the stick is down and all other aspects of the check are legal, then we have to assume the attempt was made to play the puck. It is also important to note that the player delivering the check does NOT have to be the one to gain possession of the puck. It could be a teammate or even an opponent who wins that competition for the puck.

Question

What is the interpretation of a well-placed hip check on the puck carrier, where the stick is down but not near the puck? Legal or not legal?

Answer

Legal. The “art” of a hip check is a lost skill and we have probably only seen a handful of good ones over the last several years. Once again, the stick is down and the contact is initiated with the trunk of the body to the trunk of the body, so the spirit and intent of the rules have not been violated. The one thing to keep in mind, is there is a tendency for players to go extremely low in delivering that check and the contact is made at or below the knees, which could result in a clipping infraction.

Question

Weren't a majority of the “changes” to body checking introduced as points of emphasis prior to 2019-20 season? And therefore should have been the same thing as the past two seasons?

Answer

Yes. The new language added to the rules is taken from the Declaration of Player Safety, Fair Play and Respect. They are technically not rule changes, but instead are an emphasis on certain aspects of the body checking rules and a new way of presenting the expectations of what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Question

Under the acceptable body checking, must the player delivering the check gain possession of the puck or can a teammate gain possession as long as the player delivering the check has their stick below the knees?

Answer

There is no guarantee which player or which team may actually be next to gain possession of the puck. Hockey is a very unpredictable game. As long as the check was delivered with the stick down and is legal in all other aspects (not from behind, not to the head, not below the knees, the opponent had control of the puck), it is a legal body check and is within the spirit and intent of the rules.

It is important to note that body checking and competitive contact are still allowed. USA Hockey wants players to physically compete for the puck at all levels of play. In reality, the biggest change that is a result of the language used in the rules, is an emphasis on the fact a player cannot use their hands/arms to deliver a check, and the opponent they are checking must have the puck. By having the stick down, it ensures the player is not delivering the check with their hands/arms/elbows/stick – which has recently been culturally acceptable. By focusing on winning possession of the puck, it ensures that the player being checked has control of the puck. The language pertaining to “stick on puck” is an emphasis for coaches to teach proper competitive contact and body checking progressions.

Question

Under the acceptable body checking rule, must both conditions be present for a penalty to be called? Example: both the stick below the knees and making a play on the puck.

Answer

See explanations above. But it can be generally assumed that if the stick is on the ice and the opponent has the puck that there is an effort being made to play the puck. The player does not have to first touch the puck in order for the play to be a legal body check.

Question

How do we deal with leagues/directors who decide to pick/choose which rules they'll adhere to? Example: league decided to override and continue delayed offside at all levels.

Answer

Please notify your District Referee-in-Chief for Affiliate Representatives as they do NOT have the authority to choose which rules they want to enforce.

Question

The problems I have run into are mostly with the coaches not knowing the rule changes. How do we ensure coaches are aware of these changes?

Answer

We have to accept the fact that this will take time. No matter how much information USA Hockey has distributed over the summer, there are still going to be officials/coaches/parents who have not

read the material. Coaches are still going to their clinics and doing their online modules, same with officials attending seminars and doing their online modules. The ideal scenario is to have assignors/supervisors meet with the association coaches prior to the season and go over all of the changes so there are no surprises when they show up for their first games.

Question

The enforcement of the checking rules is wildly inconsistent. Do you believe this rule is enforceable? There is so much left up to interpretation.

Answer

It is going to take time. Roughly 1/3 of officials and an even smaller percentage of coaches have been through their annual education requirements as of yet. To make a judgment and/or to panic on September 10th is not realistic, nor is it practical. The players, coaches and officials will all adjust in time and, no, there will not be an exodus of players unless it was their original goal of playing hockey was to hurt opponents.

The language incorporated into body checking rules are NOT a change. It is simply language from the Declaration of Player Safety that emphasizes certain aspects of body checking that are acceptable or unacceptable.

- It has NEVER been acceptable to hit an opponent from behind.
- It has NEVER been acceptable to hit an opponent in the head.
- It has NEVER been acceptable to use the hands/arms, elbows or stick to deliver a check to an opponent - so keep your stick on the ice and the chances of delivering a check with hands/arms/elbows/sticks are greatly reduced.
- It has NEVER been acceptable to deliver a check to an opponent who does not have the puck – so keep your stick on the ice so you can make an effort to play the puck.
- It has NEVER been acceptable to blow up an opponent who is physically engaged with another player for possession of the puck – so keep your stick on the ice and enter the physical engagement in an effort to use your body to win the puck.

The language added to Rule 640 is simply designed to emphasize these facts and provide more details to establish the expectations of coaches to teach proper competitive contact and body checking progressions AND for officials to actually enforce the rules that have always existed. It not only will be enforceable, it will establish more consistency in enforcement, as the expectations are clearer. This was mentioned several times during the ZoomCast and will emphasize again now. USA Hockey strongly encourages “physical engagement” using “competitive contact” for possession of the puck at ALL levels of play. Competitive contact IS the natural progression to teaching body checking and MUST be taught at the youngest age levels.

Question

It would be very helpful to have videos showing & clarifying acceptable vs. non-acceptable body checking under the new rule changes. Will videos be made available, and if so, when?

Answer

Yes. Similar to launching the Declaration of Player Safety, Fair Play and Respect in 2019, there will be video examples pushed out through Social Media channels and posted on USAHockey.com. Look for these to start appearing next week and we will also be updating videos, including specific examples of the new rule language, in the Mobile Rule Book application in the coming weeks.

Question

I've heard conflicting guidance about whether a team on the PP gets to pick what side they want the faceoff after a penalty/icing during a PP. What's the procedure we should follow?

Answer

No, USA Hockey has not gone to the choosing the side of the ice for the face-off location after an icing or a penalty for the youth levels of play. The same determination should apply for icing situations as in the past (side of ice where puck was shot from) and for penalty situations it would be on the side of the ice where the puck was located when play was stopped.

Question

The "general principles" slide on face-offs indicated that whenever a time penalty went up on the scoreboard, that the ensuing face-off would take place in that team's Defending Zone. 612(b) Any time a penalty is assessed that appears on the game clock and causes a team to be short-handed, the ensuing face-off shall take place at a defending zone face-off spot of the offending team. These two are not the same.

Answer

Just like anything else, it depends on how you want to interpret them. The spirit and intent of the rule is when a team commits a penalty where time is going to go on the game clock (non-coincidental or misconduct) and it will affect their on-ice strength, the face-off will take place in their defending zone, unless of course the non-offending team caused the stoppage.

The situation that seems to cause confusion is when a team is already on the power play and that team now commits an infraction that would cause play to go to 4 on 4. They are not shorthanded, so officials are incorrectly assuming the rule is not meant and it would be a last play face-off. However, it did affect on-ice strength AND that team will eventually be shorthanded (provided no other penalty assessed) once the other team's penalty expires. So, the spirit and intent of the rule has been met. This is a great example where understanding the spirit and intent of the rule is important to the proper application versus simply getting caught up solely with the wording of the rule as everyone has a tendency to interpret what they read differently.